Kemono no Souja
The Beast Player

VOLUME 2 - CHAPTER 3, PART 2

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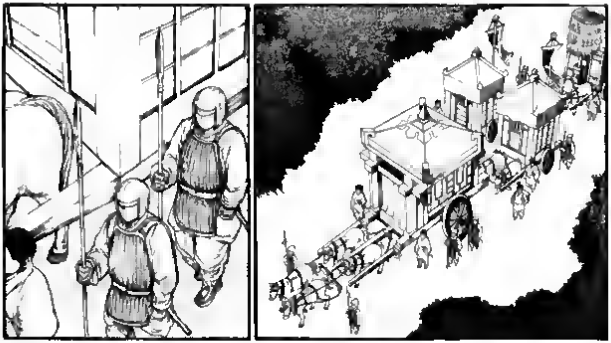


Rustle.
STEP
STEP
SHUNAN, THE ARHAN'S ELDEST SON

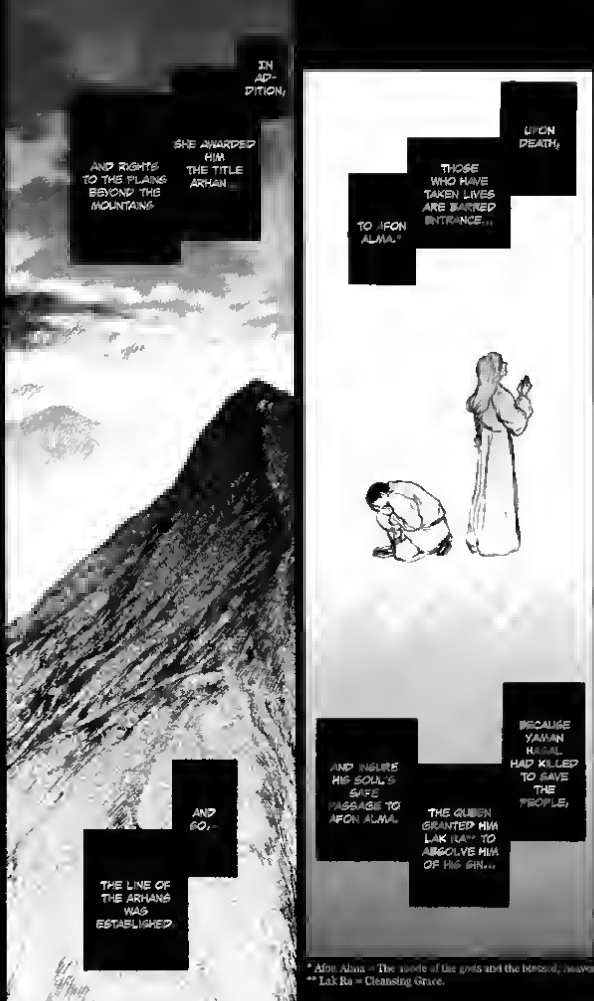
COME
YES, FATHER
THE ARHAN

THE YOJE'S
FOREST...

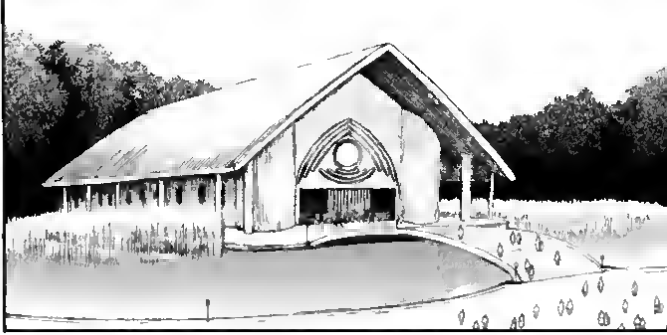
Chapter 3, part 2
The Yoje
and the Arhan

DURING THE REIGN OF THE FOURTH QUEEN IN JE'S LINE,
RYOZA WAS ATTACKED BY HAJAN, A NEIGHBORING KINGDOM.
HAVING DEEMED BLOODSHED A SIN,
THE QUEEN DECIDED TO SACRIFICE HERSELF TO THE ENEMY IN EXCHANGE FOR PEACE
HOWEVER,
YOUR MAJESTY,
HAJAN WOULD NOT HONOR YOUR WISHES, NOBLE THOUGH THEY MAY BE.
IT IS THE PEOPLE WHO WILL SUFFER...
IF OUR COUNTRY IS SUB-JUGATED,
FOR THE SAKE OF OUR PEOPLE,
I WANT TO CRUSH THE ARMIES OF HAJAN.
I AM WILLING TO STAIN MY HANDS.
YOUR MAJESTY, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO USE THE TOHDA WHISTLE.

LEADING THEM TO VICTORY AGAINST RAJAN.
THEIR MOUNTS BORE THEM ACROSS WATER AND LAND.
WITH IT, HE AND HIS MEN COMMANDED THE TOHIDA THAT DWELLED IN THE GREAT RIVER AMASUR.
THE QUEEN, SEEING WISDOM IN THE LORD'S SUGGESTION, BESTOWED UPON HIM THE SACRED TREASURE
THE QUEEN WAS DEEPLY MOVED BY HIS LOYALTY
THE LORD'S NAME WAS YAMAN HASAL.
HE WAS THE ARHAN'S FORE-FATHER
TRUE TO HIS WORD, YAMAN HASAL DID NOT RETURN TO COURT AFTER THE WAR, FOR HE HAD SINNED
HE CROSSED THE MOUNTAINS IN SELF-IMPOSED EXILE

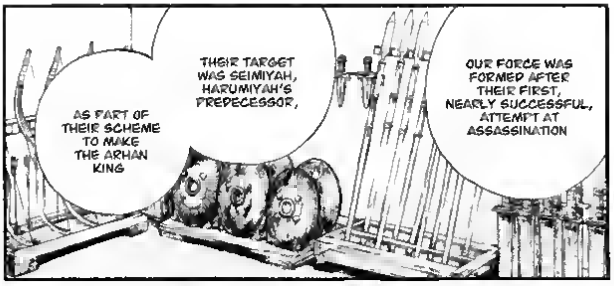

IN ADDITION,
SHE AWARDED HIM THE TITLE ARHAN...
AND RIGHTS TO THE PLAINS BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS
AND SO,...
THE LINE OF THE ARHANS WAS ESTABLISHED.
UPON DEATH,
THOSE WHO HAVE TAKEN LIVES ARE BARRED ENTRANCE...
TO AFON ALMA.*
BECAUSE YAMAN HASAL HAD KILLED TO SAVE THE PEOPLE,
THE QUEEN GRANTED HIM LAK KA** TO ABSOLVE HIM OF HIS SIN...
AND INSURE HIS SOUL'S SAFE PASSAGE TO AFON ALMA.

* Afon Alma = The abode of the gods and the blessed, heaven.
** Lak Ka = Cleansing Grace.



TODAY IS THE BIRTHDAY
OF HER MAJESTY THE YOJE HARUMIYAH

WE MUST TIGHTEN SECURITY KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR SAI GAMIRU
MANY WILL BE PRESENT AT THE FEAST, INCLUDING HIS GRACE THE ARHAN, THE NOBILITY, THE SERVANTS, AND THE MUSICIANS


AS PART OF THEIR SCHEME TO MAKE THE ARHAN KING
THEIR TARGET WAS SEIMIYAH, HARUMIYAH'S PREDECESSOR,
OUR FORCE WAS FORMED AFTER THEIR FIRST, NEARLY SUCCESSFUL, ATTEMPT AT ASSASSINATION

AND THAT HE WOULD HUNT THEM DOWN AND EXECUTE THEM
THE ARHAN AT THE TIME DECLARED HE HAD NO TIES TO SAI GAMIRU
PERISHED IN A FIRE.
BUT MIMIYAH, WHO WAS HEIR TO THE THRONE,
SEIMIYAH AND HER 3-YEAR-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER HARUMIYAH MANAGED TO ESCAPE,

THOUGH THE ARHAN'S PEOPLE WORK HARD TO SUPPORT THIS COUNTRY, THEY'RE DISPAINED
EVEN THE NAME WE CALL THEM— WAJAK — HARKENS BACK TO THEIR MIXED HERITAGE, WITH HALF THEIR ROOTS BELONGING TO THE CONQUERED PEOPLES
HOW-EVER,
SAI GAMIRU HAS CONTINUED TO SEND ASSAS-SINS—
IN ALL GUISES

CAN HER HOLY MAJESTY LOOK TO THE PEOPLE'S REVERENCE FOR PROTECTION NO LONGER
AS LONG AS THE ARHAN'S PEOPLE ARE UNHAPPY,
SAI GAMEU WILL ALWAYS HAVE SUPPORTERS FOR THEIR CAUSE

HEY,
SEH-ZAN

SAI GAMEU HAS EVEN INFILTRATED THE RANKS OF PALACE RETAINERS
BE ON YOUR GUARD!
SALUTE
SIR!

YES
THE ARHAN IS BEING SHOWN INTO THE HALL AS WE SPEAK
HAS THE WAJAK GENERAL ARRIVED AT THE PALACE?

HE HAS CREATURES LIKE THE SAI GAMRU EATING OUT OF HIS HAND...
MUTTER MUTTER
THAT SNAKE OF A MAN!
CON-FOUND HIM,

—
SUCH IMPUDENCE!
AND NOW HE'S HERE TO CELEBRATE HER MAJESTY'S BIRTHDAY

...
THE ARHAN'S FERTILE LANDS BENEFIT HER MAJESTY'S MOUNTAINOUS ESTATE IN MANY WAYS
AFTER ALL,
FLIP
IT IS UNWISE TO FLING ACCUSATIONS WITHOUT PROOF
SIR,
BEG-GING PAR-DON—

UGH.
AREN'T THOSE OF YOUR CLASS BENEFICIARIES YOURSELVES?

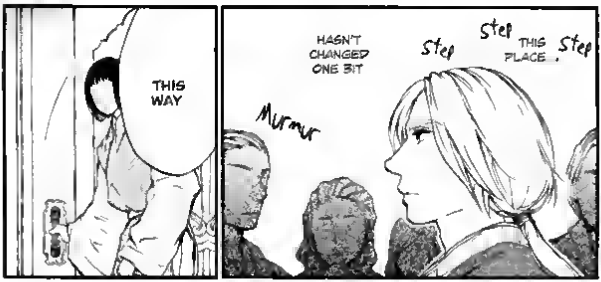
HAH.
WHO'S THE SNAKE NOW?
I EXPECT YOU'VE TAKEN ALL THE NECESSARY PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT ANY ATTACKS.

THE IDIOTS SIMPLY CAN'T SEE THAT, CAN THEY?
WHY HASN'T HE? WHY WON'T HE?
IF THE MAN TRULY WANTS THE YOJE DEAD, HE HAS THE ARMY AT HIS DISPOSAL TO DO IT.
HIS MEN—THE TOHPA SOLDIERS—KEEP THE COUNTRY SAFE.
I'M NO FRIEND OF THE ARHAN, BUT—

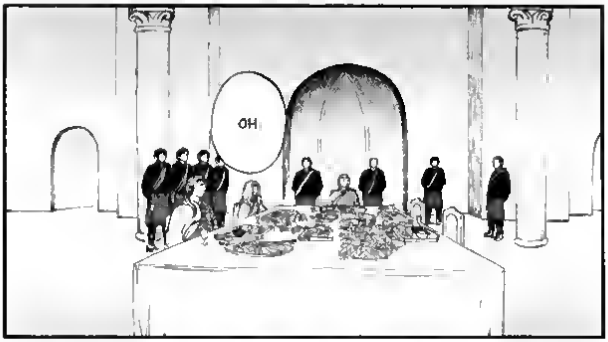
THE YOJE AND THE ARHAN
OVER THE YEARS,
WITH POWER AND AUTHORITY DIVIDED BETWEEN THEM...
FRICTION HAS DEVELOPED FROM TIME TO TIME
THE YOJE MAKES ALL FINAL JUDGMENTS...
AND SEES TO STATE ADMINISTRATION
BUT
THE ARHAN IS THE ONE WITH MILITARY AND ECONOMIC POWER

HUSH
DAMN IT ALL
TOUGH TIMES WE LIVE IN
Mutter

Whisper
Whisper
Murmur
Murmur


THIS WAY
HASN'T CHANGED ONE BIT
Step
Step
THIS PLACE.
Step
Murmur

CREAK
NOW...
BUT...
BA-DUMP
BA-DUMP


OH

I'M GLAD YOU CAME,
ARHAN, SHUNAN

DAMIYAH
YOJE HARUMIYAH
SEIMIYAH
BOW
YOUR MAJESTY,
CONGRAT-ULATIONS ON YOUR BIRTHDAY AND MANY HAPPY RETURNS

IF WE DON'T EAT NOW, THE FOOD WILL GO COLD
I'M AFRAID THE TABLE WAS LAID TOO EARLY
LET US DISPENSE WITH FORMALITY. TAKE A SEAT.
THANK YOU.
Smile
CLATTER
...
Bow
...!

THANK YOU, YOUR MAJESTY
I MUST BE QUITE OLD
ALREADY TWENTY, IS THAT RIGHT? I STILL REMEMBER YOU AS A LITTLE BOY.
OH, SHUNAN,
YOU'VE GROWN INTO A STRONG YOUNG MAN
WITH THE EYES OF A MAN
HE STARES AT OUR PRINCESS SEIMIYAH
HE IS GROWN, AND NOT ONLY PHYSICALLY.
LORD PAMIYAH—
...!

Note: Seimiyah and Damiyah are first cousins once removed (she's Haruniyah's nephew) but she calls him uncle.

BUT HE KNOWS HIS PLACE, I ASSURE YOU
NO MAN CAN LOOK AT THE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS SEIMIYAH WITHOUT BLUSHING.
CERTAINLY MY SON IS FAST BOYHOOD

I TRUST EVERYTHING IS READY OUTSIDE
OPEN THE WINDOWS
MA'AM
NOW
WE SHALL PUT THAT BEHIND US
THIS BIRTHDAY—
IS MY SIXTIETH
THOUGH IT PAINS ME TO SAY IT—
Creeaak
PULL

flut
ter

OH. MY!
LET THE FEAST—
BEGIN!
WONDERFUL!

To be continued in Kemono no Souja *volume* III

Special interview with

Uehashi Nahoko *and* Takemoto Itoe

Reproduced from the magazine!

In celebration of the publication of *Kemono no Souja* Volume III *Quest* and Volume IV *Finis*.

To commemorate the simultaneous publication of volume one of the manga and the two last volumes of the novel, we had a chat with the author and the artist. They talk freely about *Quest* and *Finis* (beware spoilers), the manga, what makes an endearing character, and plenty of other things!

Interviewed by *Sirius* Editorial Department

Follow-up volumes

Takemoto Itoe (I) They were wonderful. I have many favorite chapters, but the one with Erin buying gold thread is the most dear to my heart. I'd love to find out more about her friend, Yu-yan. Anyway, Erin had to rush to town to buy gold thread because she forgot all about the belt she was supposed to embroider for Jeh-si, her son. The chapter had me in stitches.

As far as that goes, Soh-yon is the perfect mother. But Erin... (laughter)

Uehashi Nahoko (U) Not so much. (laughter) She has a one-track mind—which makes her something of a clueless genius.

T: So you see, she's an endearing character. This time, she keeps messing up. You see more of her cute, girlish side in the sequel. As a woman, I felt I could relate to that.

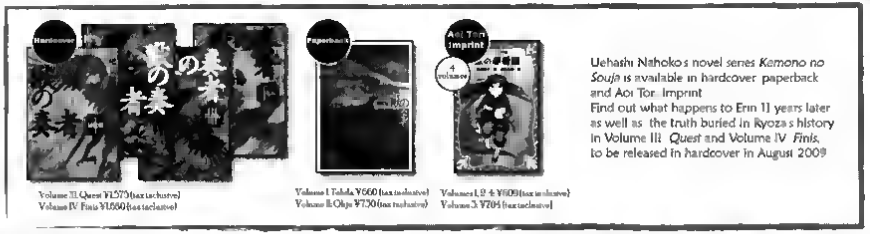
U: (Laughter) Can you believe she's past thirty and still retains some of her girlishness?

T: In the first two volumes, I saw Erin as a lone fighter, a hero in her own right. But in the third and fourth, there's more to her story, there's more about her life. Erin's relationship with Lilan dominates *Tohda* and *Ohyu*, and the world is built around them. Those two volumes make you pray for Erin to have a happy ending, and in *Quest* and *Finis*, you get to see her happy.

U: I'm pleased to hear that. Very pleased.

T: And I love Rolan, one of the new characters. He's probably replaced Ja-lu as my favorite character. He just exudes sexiness. Ori's a darling, too!

Then there's Black Armor Yohal, the toughest tohda army veteran. He's so cool. I was biting my nails when I realized he might be a bad guy, I was cheering when he was saving Erin, I was thrilled that he was Soh-yon's kindred spirit.



Volume II: *Quest* ¥1,575 (tax inclusive)
Volume IV: *Finis* ¥1,050 (tax inclusive)

Volume I: *Tohda* ¥660 (tax inclusive)
Volume II: *Ohju* ¥730 (tax inclusive)

Volumes I, II & III: ¥609 (tax inclusive)
Volume 3: ¥704 (tax inclusive)

Uehashi Nahoko's novel series *Kemono no Souja* is available in hardcover, paperback and Aoi Tori Imprint.
Find out what happens to Erin 11 years later as well as the truth buried in Ryoza's history in Volume III *Quest* and Volume IV *Finis*, to be released in hardcover in August 2009.

"Takemoto-san, I can't think of a better person than you for my story."

T: *(Continued)* When the letter arrived, I was psyched. I was thinking, "Here comes the moment of revelation!"

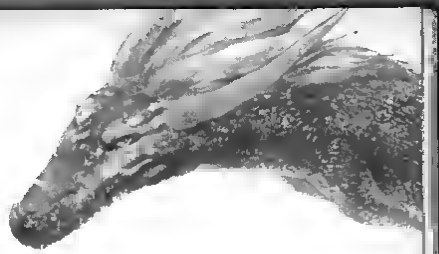
U: Ooh! I intended that to be a big moment. Glad to know it managed to hook you. (laughter)

T: Thank you for giving me a story I couldn't put down.

Mythopoeia

Q: *Quest* and *Finis* tell an epic story of conflicts, but they also read like an old myth passed down the generations. The world-building is immersive, but the perspective is slightly impersonal—a third-person view. Was it intentional?

U: Well... it's like riding a roller coaster—you have to go from start to finish to see the bigger picture. You have to piece together the puzzle as you ride. I don't know how it turned out the way it did, but that's the writing style I enjoy.



Q: I thought it might have something to do with your succinct prose.

U: I wonder. But you know, I experienced the same thing reading Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings. The writing is so vivid, as if you're right there with the characters. You could practically feel every leaf crunching beneath your feet. Then when it's over, you get the feeling you've just read a grand myth.

(Pause) Though, that's probably because it doesn't revolve around one person. Neither does my story, but it has a certain balance between character-building and world-building. I didn't set out to write only about Erin. We have Ia-lu's point of view. Rolan's, a bunch of other people's—and they all intersect to form a story. Maybe that's why you get that sense of distance.

Q: I see. And the result is a story that reads like a local myth. You don't write excessive details, either, do you?

U: I'm not a fan of overwriting. I don't have the patience for it. Really, I run up escalators. (laughter) I have readers who want more descriptions. But I believe in letting readers fill in the gaps with their imaginations. It makes for a richer experience. I personally like reading between the lines.

T: There's a similar concept in art: the white space. I learned it when I was younger. Basically, when you draw, you have to extend your composition beyond your panel. Keep it all inside the panel, [illegible]. "Less is more" definitely applies to storytelling, too.

U: I think it's very important that you don't spoon-feed your readers.

T: It's a lot like social dynamics. Interacting with people.

U: Precisely! Explaining takes the wonder and suspense out of your story, because your readers know too much.

Plotting, or lack thereof

Q: Uehashi-san, I hear you don't plot your stories. When the first volume [illegible] you had only envisioned a woman playing a harp in the dark and a giant beast with glittering eyes approaching her. That was the story's starting point, you said. Once you had it, the rest just flowed. Imagine my shock.

U: Um, it's only easy when I'm feeling inspired. When I'm stuck, I flounder.

Volume 1 page 9
Erin goes with her mother to see Ishda.

Volume 2 page 76 Soh-yon's Takemoto-san's favor to character. I keep drawing Soh-yon every [illegible]

Lively Art

U: Takemoto-san here has truly art. When it moves—that's a weird way of putting it, since illustrations are stationary, but I swear her art moves. It's fascinating. She's really good at drawing children.

T: Whenever I hear that, I can't help feeling giddy.

U: You have a way of capturing that sense of restlessness children have.

T: Here's something I only realized recently from talking to other people. They hardly remember their childhood. My own earliest memory is from my kindergarten days.

U: I remember being carried by my mother. You have a futon closet at home, don't you? There's usually a single shelf in the middle. I remember my mother putting me there before she carried me.

T: It gave me food for thought. Maybe it's because we remember what it was like to be children that we can tell stories about them.

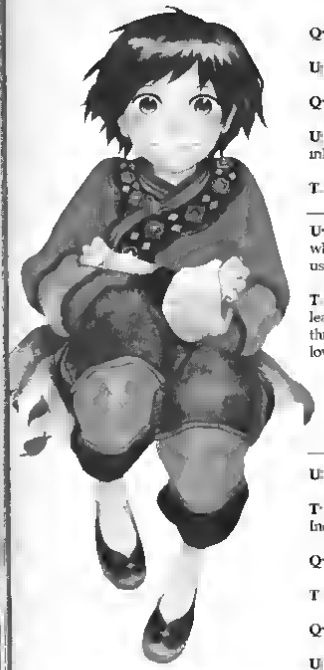
U: Authors and illustrators have episodic memories in spades. Those memories really stand out. I think. I don't mean retention. It's remembering everything about a specific event in your life like a story.

T: I remember things like feeling hurt over something someone said. I don't remember much of what happened before and after. Only what I experienced.

U: When you remember something, the rest [illegible] follows?

U & T: That's it.

Ramona Trivia #1



Q: And it's been like that ever since you first took up your pen?

U: Probably. Yes. I think so.

Q: Were you an aspiring author growing up?

U: Being an author wasn't something I aspired to so much as something that came naturally to me. For as far back as I can remember, I always had a vague inkling that I was going to be an author someday.

T: I was only interested in manga. I didn't think of anything else. The only way I could study at school was by making it relevant to manga.

U: Oh, I did the same thing! Storytelling is related to everything. So I treated whatever I learned at school, whatever I experienced, as something I might use in my stories in the future.

T: Yes. When you're curious, you want to find out more. It's more fun learning that way. I only just discovered that drawing is pretty much a throw-in for me, really. I love using my tools of trade, but I'm not so sure I love drawing all that much. (laughter)

From vision to story

Q: Earlier, we mentioned the vision that started it all. Was it only visual, or did it come with other sensations like texture and sound?

U: When I conjure up a scene in my head, I hear sounds, smell smells, feel the wind blowing. But it doesn't look anything like manga.

T: It depends, but sometimes I dream in frames and panels.

U: Ooh. Interesting.

T: They come in all shapes and sizes, depending on the scene.

U: You see yourself reading the manga you drew in your head.

T: They're never complete in my head, so I have to finish them by hand. When I read novels, I picture the scenes in manga form, too. Including *Kemono no Souja*.

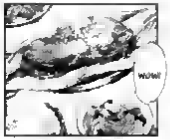
Q: Then, you're saying thinking in manga form is ingrained in you?

T: I guess it is. I haven't drawn as much as I've read or seen. I retain the layouts of my favorite manga in my head and try to fit things into them.

Q: How about you, Uehashi-sensei? How do you usually visualize scenes?

U: They look real. Like places I could enter at any moment.

Volume 1 page 147 Erin as Elko



Volume 1 page 60. Soh-yo prepares wild pork in leeks.

The author's food cravings

Q: The food in your books sounds delicious.

U: Thank you. I wrote a cookbook, too, you know.*

Q: Yes, you did! It contains the recipes of all the dishes featured in your books so far. I really enjoyed reading it. Do you come up with them because the story calls for them?

U: No, there's a far simpler reason. I include whatever food I'm craving. (laughter)

Q: You mean, at one point, you were craving wild pork? (laughter)

U: I was. (laughter) Wild pork tastes a lot like normal pork. It's not that hard to imagine the taste. Is it? Now you know why I was hankering for all of pork.

Q: Fake sounds good, too!

U: Actually, during the time I was writing about fake, I really, really wanted to eat it. So I baked English muffins til I crispy, soaked them in butter, and ate them with milk, sugar and honey.

Q: Like French toast?

U: That's right. French toast without eggs. Lighter, richer. They were good.

Q: Takamoto-san, didn't you try out the recipe, too?

T: I put store-bought bread in warm milk and honey, and served. I to the entire staff. (laughter)

***Reiza's Cuisine* by Uehashi Nahoko and Team Hokkaido**
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Culinary delights as featured in *Moribito* and *Kemono no Souja*, captured in this cookbook.

Kemono Trivia #2

Figure 1
(left) Volume 1 page 46. Soh-yon plays catch in the dead zohda. *(right)* Soh-yon sits atop the tohda in the swamp.

Q: Do you have a 360-degree view of your imaginary world?

U: Of course. If I look behind me, I'll probably find someone.

T: Aren't dream worlds ever-changing, though? They could be in gekiga* style or in color or...

*<*TN: Gekiga is to manga as graphic novels are to comics. Gekiga can be said to be the precursor to seinen manga.>*

U: What, gekiga-style?

T: Gekiga-style. You know, like those drawn by Monkey Punch?**

*<**TN: Creator of Lupin III.>*

U: You're kidding! (laughter)

T: It's never the same every time I dream. Sometimes I dream in color. Sometimes the colors are too strong, like in a movie by an up-and-coming director. Other times it's like being in a game. Things like that.

U: Not for me. My dreams feel perfectly real, as real as the world we live in. Well, until the more fantastic elements ruin the illusion.

Q: In other words, it's the same when you dream and when you visualize?

U: I think they're alike, yes. In both cases, I see a world so real, I inhabit it. And that's why it never looks like Monkey Punch drew it. (laughter)

T: His lineart has that sketchy quality. I've also dreamed of friends being dressed like the kings in *Dragon Quest*. (laughter)

U: Never. (laughter) Takemoto-san, you're a mangaka through and through.

From novel to manga

Q: How did you feel when you saw the manga?

U: The whistling scene was incredible. I kept looking at it over and over and over.

T: I cried when I read the storyboard. "Soh-yon, you have to ride one, too!"

Figure 2
Volume 1, page 107. The tel elju makes a surreal appearance.

U: Also, this scene and this scene *(pointing to Figure 1)* could have been lifted straight from my head.

T: I already had a clear picture of them from when I was reading the novel. All I had to do was draw them.

U: Unlike anime, there's no sound in manga. Seeing Soh-yon's face, though, you could almost hear her whistling. I was impressed. I love it.

T: Thank you.

U: The seireju scene *(Figure 2)* was another surprise. It felt like stepping into my own brain. That's how well you nailed it.

T: My assistant was muttering, "It's Sento-kun.*" (laughter) So I said, "I know what you're thinking, but don't you dare say it!" (laughter)

*<*TN: Sento-kun, the mascot chosen to mark Nara's 1,300th anniversary, looks like a boy with antlers.>*

U: That never occured to me. In fact, I wrote that before Sento-kun was even conceived. (laughter) If anything, I thought the seireju might be taken for the Celtic horned god.

Fun with sketching

Q: Uehashi-sensei, you did the preliminary design for ohju, didn't you, for Takemoto-san to base her illustrations on? Are there more sketches?

U: Yes. I like drawing... no longer drew these days, though.

Q: Did you do a lot of sketches?

U: Not too many. I also collect pictures of people around the world from National Geographic, among others. I like using them for reference, especially old people.

T: Realistic art isn't really my thing, but I enjoy drawing old men.

U: Yeah! I like drawing old men. Now I'm itching to draw them.

T: Their faces tell you everything!

U: I feel like drawing old Uyghur men.

T: I know what you mean. Asian faces are gorgeous.

U: They are.

T: [illegible]

Nahoko Uehashi

Nemono Trivia #3

Figure 3
Volume 1, page 138. Joh-un dozes off while watching over Erin. She can't help laughing at him.

U: *(Continued)* By the way, these panels featuring a snoring Joh-un *(Figure 3)* played out exactly as I pictured the scene. He really did bob this way and that.

T: I wanted to keep that scene no matter what. It's a little condensed, but overall faithful to the novel.

Challenges in adapting to a visual medium

U: Actually, I think my books are hard to adapt into manga. Everybody thinks it's easy, because when you read, you visualize. But the thing is, I think the best parts of my books are the hardest to depict.

T: The highlights aren't made for the manga format.

U: I agree. It's a real challenge because I think in terms of sentence rhythm. A successful adaptation requires an artist who not only can animate characters, but who can also paint the world they live in. Takemoto-san here is one such artist. When I was working with Fujiwara Kamui-san on *Seirei no Moribito*—not in Strius, sorry—he told me he wanted to draw water, so he filled an entire page with a scene in a river. It gave me goose bumps. I understood then that he too wanted to draw the world, and it got me thinking. Only artists like him can do my books justice. Takemoto-san, on the other hand, doesn't emphasize the backdrop at the expense of other elements. I'm awed.

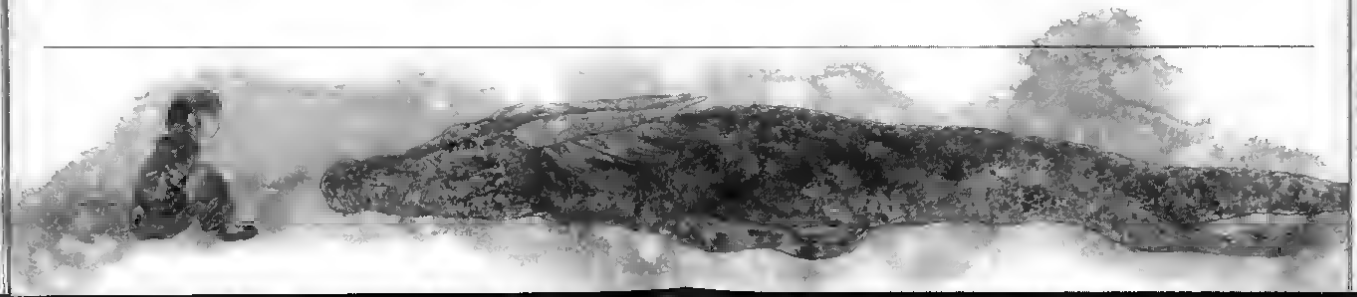
T: I want to draw action and facial expressions, while still keeping the background details. I try to do just that. Normally, when writing a manga, your number one priority is the plot structure. With relevant dialogue and panel layout, you can improve your pacing. This time, though, I have my work cut out for me by the novel series. The rhythm may be a little off—more action means more pages and all that.

Q: But the story goes well with the way Takemoto-san likes to work?

U: Yes, it does. You almost never hear of manga only being serialized after they're completed, do you? Most have plots that grow steadily. Novels, however, have a tighter structure that needs to be broken down into parts. I think that's where the two formats greatly differ.

T: Yeah, but I feel like I'm fumbling in the dark. (laughter)

U: You have a writer-type mind, if anything, Takemoto-san. Novels can be read in one sitting, but manga and anime have intervals between episodes, so you need to end each episode in a way that keeps your audience coming back for more. What's more, manga magazines contain a number of serialized manga, which may affect the overall reading experience. I look forward to my own work more than others... I feel bad.



T: *(Continued)* I'm more excited about my own work, too. People call me hyper. (laughter)

U: People who think that's a great thing will like it, and people who don't will be surprised.

T: Yes. There's that.

Favorite page

U: I think this page *(Figure 4)* is impressive.

T: The layout had me stumped, but in the end I decided to go vertical. I went back and fixed the bottom of the first panel for the volume publication.

U: Whoa. You mean this lighter part isn't a screen tone? You were lying when you said you didn't enjoy drawing.

Figure 4.
Volume 1, page 76. Ema becomes depressed following her mother's arrest. The first panel's bottom corner is shaded instead of fully inked.

T: Well, it's my job. (laughter) I was on automatic pilot, so it wasn't that painful. Though shading does involve a great deal of effort. The cliff *(Figure 5)* was a real piece of work, too.

U: Wow, Takemoto-san, you are dedicated. (laughter) You know, your art has this sense of depth and distance to it.

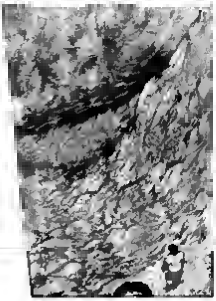


Figure 5.
Volume 2, page 84. A stream in Mount Kasho where Iohda live.

T: But my long shots are overdone. I have plenty of overdone long shots in this manga, to tell you the truth. I look back and think, "The lengths I've gone to..." Even though I love doing detailed long shots, drawing teensy-weensy figures is a pain. I wonder why I bother.

(All laugh)

U: But you love it!

T: I do!

U: Takemoto-san, I really can't think of a better person than you for my story. (laughter)

**This interview was first published in Monthly Shounen Sirius October issue 2009 and on Kodansha Book Club's Kozuno no Souja special Web page.*

Character Design Sketches

Early character designs from before serialization, revealed!

From quick sketches based on first impressions of the novel series, through trial and error, to final designs.

Erin and Soh-yon

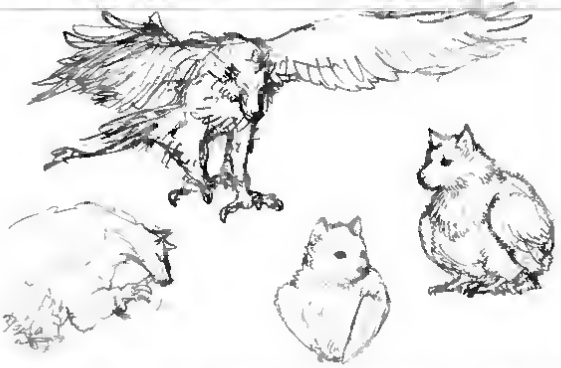
Since manga is black and white I decided to ink their hair to make their eyes stand out. I wanted to draw them with simple but elegant lines.

Joh-un

A hairy bear like man I wanted him to be more big-boned than fat

Oh-ju

Has a majestic head For the body I referred to birds of prey Has paws I didn t include a tohda in the swooping sketch, but it s supposed to look more like a crocodile than a gigantic lizard



First stage

Second stage

Final stage

Aru

The most difficult character to design
My initial sketch made him look too young
I m struggling (present continuous tense) to give him that calm vibe

Harumiyah and Damiyah

Harumiyah is dignified and elegant, but with a certain softness
Damiyah is an extremely charming man of means
To give him more personality, I put tones in his hair, indicating he dyed it.

Seimyah and Shunan

Seimyah is a beautiful princess
She's more ladylike than Enn, for better or for worse
With Shunan, I was going for the old-school princely look, but he kind of looks like a sheltered young man